

## CAN AIRCRAFT AND ALBATROSSES COEXIST AT MIDWAY ISLAND?

Richard A. Dolbeer, USDA/APHIS/ADC, Denver Wildlife Research Center, 6100  
Columbus Avenue, Sandusky, OH 44870

Eugene LeBoeuf, Bird Aircraft Strike Hazard (BASH) Team, HQ AFSA/SEFW,  
9700 Ave G, SE, Suite 279A, Bldg. 24499, Kirtland AFB, NM 87117-5671

Maj. David P. Arrington, USAF, BASH Team, HQ AFSA/SEFW, 9700 Ave G, SE,  
Suite 279A, Bldg. 24499, Kirtland AFB, NM 87117-5671

Lt. Christine Atkins, USAF, BASH Team, HQ AFSA/SEFW, 9700 Ave G, SE, Suite  
279A, Bldg. 24499, Kirtland AFB, NM 87117-5671

**Abstract:** The nesting population of albatrosses on Sand Island, Midway Atoll, has increased from <50,000 adults in 1939 to about 400,000 adults in 1995. Consequently, bird strikes are an increasingly serious problem for aircraft landing at the Naval Air Facility (NAF) on Sand Island. In 1993, strikes were reported for 57 (12%) of the 459 aircraft movements at the NAF. In April 1995, we monitored movements of albatrosses and other birds across the 8,000-ft runway by time of day. Bird activity was extremely high during all daylight hours with a mean of 363 birds (85% Laysan albatrosses, 3% black-footed albatrosses, 12% other species) recorded crossing the runway per minute. There were no periods of bird inactivity during daylight hours. Runway crossings ranged from about 250 birds/minute during midday (1100-1400 hr) to 525/minute during early morning (0700-1000 hr). In contrast, runway crossings at night averaged only 6 birds (mainly Bonin petrels)/minute. Albatross crossings/minute averaged <0.5 at night. To minimize the probability of strikes, non-emergency aircraft movements at Midway should be restricted to hours of darkness during the albatross nesting season (November-July).

Presently, the NAF on Midway is scheduled to be closed by 1997 when the island will be administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) as a Wildlife Refuge. The USFWS is considering allowing private companies to develop an eco-tourism industry for the island to defray the high costs of maintaining the airfield and support facilities. However, the extreme bird strike hazard resulting from the high concentration of birds on the island may be a limiting factor in the development of an eco-tourism industry.